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COMMITTEES:

CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES
EDUCATION
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY
COLLEGES
FINANCE
TRANSPORTATION

Marlene Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St., SW
The Portals
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: Alltel Communications, Inc. ETC Petitions,
CC Docket No. 96-45, DA 05-3005

Dear Secretary Dortch:

I am writing to encourage you to look favorable on Alltel Communications' application with the Federal Communications Commission seeking Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (ETC) status in rural areas of North Carolina. Access to affordable telecommunications services is critical for rural consumers. Rural consumers rely on the utility and convenience of mobile telecommunications services for voice communications, email and internet access, and emergency services. Increasingly, consumers expect their wireless phones to work, regardless of their location, but yet the cost of serving rural areas can be prohibitively expensive. In recognition of this fact, Congress and the FCC have established a competitive universal service system that allows eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs) to receive support for providing service in rural areas. I strongly support Alltel's application for the following reasons:

1. The value of universal service as a national goal will be preserved and enhanced by making funding available for wireless services that consumers increasingly rely on for their telecommunications needs;
2. Rural communities and consumers, in particular, will benefit having access to wireless services throughout the designated service areas;
3. Alltel has a strong commitment to rural America, but will not be able to implement its universal service plans to the benefit of rural communities and consumers without designation as an ETC.

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Today, a consumer's concept of connection to the public switched network has shifted from connection to locations to connection to consumers themselves. Several factors confirm the importance of wireless service to consumers, including: growth in wireless and flattening or decline in wireline penetration; growth in wireless usage and declines in wireline usage; substitution of wireless for wireline access and usage; declining wireless prices; and wireless service characteristics that are of value to consumers. In keeping with this paradigm shift, universal service is no longer preserved and advanced by funding only network connections via wireline facilities. Instead, the public interest is doubly served by wireless services being eligible for universal service funding.

Rural communities and consumers, in particular, will benefit having access to wireless services throughout the designated service areas. Universal service is a government policy for the benefit of rural communities and consumers. This policy can only be successful if it evolves to meet the needs of rural communities and consumers. Today, rural communities and consumers need access to wireless services. Whether it is being able to make and receive calls at home, on the road, or in an emergency situation, wireless service improves in the lives of rural consumers. Furthermore, a rural community's economic development depends upon wireless service, and many consumers will not reside in an area that does not have access to wireless service. The prominent role wireless services have been playing in the recovery and rebuilding of the Gulf Coast areas devastated by Hurricane Katrina underscores this point. Universal service funding for wireless services will allow rural America to keep pace with urban areas in terms of access to comparable telecommunications services.

Alltel has a strong commitment to rural Americans in North Carolina, but will not be able to implement its universal service plans to its customers there without designation as an ETC. Alltel has a strong track record of serving rural America. Its prior designation as an ETC in non-rural areas has benefited these communities and consumers. Expanding Alltel's ETC designation to rural areas will result in the construction of new facilities to serve previously unserved areas. It will provide access to services needed in rural areas, for example expanded calling areas, internet and email access, and better service quality.

I urge the FCC to expeditiously grant the application of Alltel for designation as an ETC in North Carolina.

Sincerely,



Representative Jerry C. Dockham

JCD/rmi